

THE STORY

Low-income renters in the Portland area are getting priced out of their housing. Here's why that was always the deal

Property owners can take a tax credit if they offer affordable housing to low-income renters. But after a certain number of years, they're free to take an offramp.

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PORTLAND, Ore. — Three decades ago, the federal government launched a program that incentivized property owners to provide [affordable housing](#) for people with lower incomes. Now, all these years later, some owners have an opportunity to bow out of the program, and many are taking advantage of it.

For low-income renters in the Portland metro area, it's a terrifying prospect — one that carries the very real risk of leaving them homeless when housing prices and homelessness are already an intractable problem.

The [Low-Income Housing Tax Credit](#) is supported by the federal government and [operated by the state](#). It first launched in 1986, becoming permanent in 1993.

With the credit, property owners get a tax break that lasts between 10 and 60 years, depending on the project. In exchange, they reserve some of their units for low-income renters.

The program was wildly popular across the U.S., growing to include more than 50,000 projects nationwide containing 3.4 million units, either apartments or houses.

But the deal has always included an built-in countdown. Once the time is up, owners are allowed to raise the rates for those low-income units up to market rate.

That's precisely what has happened to some apartment complexes in Oregon. The Woodspring Apartments in Tigard, which KGW reporter Blair Best [covered last week](#), are one example. They had a 30-year deal that started in 1991.



Federal regulations require owners to let low-income residents stay in their homes for three years after the deal expires — a grace period, more or less. For the senior tenants at the Woodspring Apartments, that time runs out at the end of this year. Past that point, the owners will be able to raise prices up to market rate, though the increase each year is [limited by Oregon's rent control laws](#).

The end of the deal will impact about 70 units at Woodspring. Lois Keck, now 80 years old, has lived in one of those units for 20 years.

"I feel like I want to cry. Because if they can't or won't — I don't know what we're going to do," Keck told KGW. "It's just not right. When you have something seniors can afford, but you take that away from them ... but you say we're going to build all this new development for (the) homeless — why in the world are they sending us out on the street when they can, for a fraction of the money, keep us housed instead of having to start all over again?"

Keck said that she currently pays about \$1,200 a month for her one-bedroom apartment. The market rate would be closer to \$1,800, which she cannot afford.

Shelly Perez is another renter. She and her husband waited a year and a half to get into a low-income unit at Woodspring. She had no idea that it was all going to change so soon.

"We have fallen in love with our neighbors," Perez said. "And they're not neighbors, they're our friends now. And we don't want to have to go anywhere. We want to stay there. But you can't when you can't afford it."

Oregon Housing and Community Services estimates that the low-income requirements for about 4,400 units will expire within the next 8 years.

The Oregon legislature has set aside \$450,000 for Washington County to help the tenants at Woodspring. Of that amount, up to \$200,000 can be used by the county for staff and administration. The remaining \$250,000 will go toward one-time payments of \$3,000 to the low-income renters in danger of being priced out, either helping them to move out or pay the increased rent.

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Definition

THE STORY

When snow comes to Portland, why is it always like this?

Portland has a long, inglorious history of coming to a screeching halt when it gets much in the way of snow accumulation.



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PORTLAND, Ore. — When snow hits Portland, it's almost predictable. Traffic grinds to a halt. Drivers get [stuck on the roads for hours](#), sometimes without moving more than a mile or two. Many end up abandoning their cars, preferring to take their chances on foot. And the whole mess gets left behind, sometimes for days.



"You'll notice the abandoned Fed Ex truck, the school bus, several other vehicles as well," KGW's Mike Benner [reported on Thursday](#), following the Portland metro area's unexpected snow accumulations the day before.

"What's ultimately the issue here?" said truck driver [who'd been stuck on the interstate](#) in Portland since about 12:30 a.m. "Nobody was prepared for it."

But it's far from a new problem. Similar problems and similar complaints have plagued the city for decades.

"Well I'll tell you something that's been bugging me ever since I left my house about an hour ago," one person said on KGW during a snow storm in 1969. "That's all these bald-tired daredevils on the road."

So if the problem has been around for so long, how has the local response to snow changed, if it's changed at all?

As the snow began to fall on Wednesday, word was slow to spread that this would be more than the dusting, perhaps an inch or two, that most people expected.

Around 4 p.m., The Story's Pat Dooris headed toward home and hit gridlock trying to get on I-405 in order to cross the river over the Fremont Bridge. All around the region, others were finally realizing the storm was a serious one, and they began jamming the freeways heading home from work.

Dooris didn't see any sanding, salt or de-icer trucks around. And with so many people trying to squeeze onto snowy roads, it didn't take long to wonder how ambulances and other emergency rigs were managing.

On I-405, Dooris spotted an ambulance that managed to creep past the traffic, probably on its way to Legacy Emanuel or Randall Children's Hospital on the other side of the bridge.

Eventually, traffic started to move. But as the snow started to build up on the pavement, plows were nowhere in evidence.

Not our first rodeo

So why weren't the plows and de-icer trucks visibly out and about on Wednesday?



Portland Transportation Commissioner Mingus Mapps blamed the forecast and the gridlock.

"As late as 2:30 Wednesday afternoon we were in communications with the weather center. They were telling us, maybe expect half an inch or something," Mapps said. "And then I think about 2:30, that's when we got the call saying if this weather system stays the way it is, we could see up to 8 inches — which is literally the perfect storm."

"So, it's Wednesday. You actually got lots of people going into the offices on Wednesday — literally zero notification about this. And then it's rush hour. So, PBOT had, did an amazing job being ready to go, but frankly we sent our trucks out there at exactly the time when everyone else was hitting the road so a lot of our plows were frankly, stuck in traffic too."

Mapps said the storm taught him that next time he should send city workers home sooner, and spread the word for businesses to do the same.

But based on recent history, it's not clear that city leaders have learned much from past events like this. In 2016, a snow storm hit on a Wednesday and likewise snarled traffic. It trapped

drivers on Highway 26 and stranded school buses. City leaders at the time thought that it was no big deal.

"I actually haven't heard that concern so I'm a little surprised to hear that," then-Mayor Charlie Hales told KGW's Loral Porter. "Again, I think the city did a good job. It's a 2-inch snow storm."

"But it caused a lot of problems," Porter replied.

"Some people in other parts of the country might be amused that we consider this a 'Snowpocalypse,'" Hales said.

The next year was more dramatic. In 2017, Portland got walloped by an even worse storm, with 6.5 inches on the ground. This time, Mayor Ted Wheeler admitted that things did not go well.

"Too many roads have been closed, schools have been closed for too long, businesses have lost a lot of economic opportunity and people have been exposed to the elements in this community who should not have been exposed to the elements," he said.

Wheeler also specifically pledged that the city would learn from those mistakes.

"These last two and a half weeks has been a very humbling experience, but let's learn from it, let's pick up from it," he said. "Let's have the hard conversations. Let's evaluate how we did and not be defensive about it, and if there's things we can improve, let's improve."

In 2019, the Portland metro area got hit by an ice storm. Some roads were treated with salt, some were not. A PBOT spokesman judged that the city had done well:

"We never give ourselves an A and never 100% because we're always learning from every event. But given the routes that we've mapped and the level of services and resources that the city dedicates, the routes that we treated were clear."

Then, in 2021, Portland got hammered again, this time with 10 inches of snow. Naturally, there were plenty of problems.

But this time, city officials like Mapps weren't wrong when they said that the weather forecast changed on them rapidly. The city gets its weather forecast directly from the National Weather Service. They'd said there was just a 5% chance that the storm would dump a considerable amount of snow.

KGW's meteorology team was stumped as well. Chief meteorologist Matt Zaffino has been forecasting weather in Portland for 35 years. On Thursday evening, he explained what happened with this surprise outcome, when his worst case scenario had been closer to 3 inches of snow.

"What happened is this was a very small-scale feature and it stalled, I mean it literally just stopped moving," Zaffino explained. "Had it kept moving, it would have pulled the heavy snow away with it, and it didn't do that."

While meteorologists throughout the Portland metro area expected that system to bring snow, they also expected it to move on by Wednesday evening. Instead, it just sat over top of the region, continuously showering snow even as temperatures dropped due to cold winds coming from the east.



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